DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 278 SO 022 754

AUTHOR Risinger, C. Frederick
TITLE Trends in K-12 Social Studies. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-SO-92-8
PUB DATE Oct 92
CONTRACT RI88062009
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Controversial Issues (Course Content); *Curriculum Development; Educational Change; *Elementary Secondary Education; Ethical Instruction; Geography Instruction; History Instruction; Literature; Multicultural Education; Religion Studies; *Social Studies; Teaching Methods; Western Civilization; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Drawing on contemporary research literature, recently developed curriculum guides, and blue-ribbon reports, this digest reviews 10 contemporary trends in K-12 social studies in the United States. Trends are as follows: (1) History, history, and more history; (2) More geography, too; (3) Using literature to teach social studies; (4) Focus on the multicultural nature of American society; (5) Renewed attention to western civilization; (6) Renewed attention to ethics and values; (7) Increased attention to the role of religion; (8) Attention to contemporary and controversial issues; (9) Covering issues in depth; and (10) Writing, writing, and more writing. (DB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED351278

# TRENDS IN K-12 SOCIAL STUDIES

by

C. Frederick Risinger

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

So 022 754

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC

Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education
2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47408 (812) 855-3838

ERIC Digest EDO-SO-92-8 October 1992

# TRENDS IN K-12 SOCIAL STUDIES

by C. Frederick Risinger

Drawing on contemporary research literature, recently developed curriculum guides, and blue-ribbon reports, this Digest reviews ten contemporary trends in K-12 social studies in the United States.

**Trend 1: History, History, and More History.** Every major curriculum report in recent years has called for more emphasis on history. Some argue that history is the single discipline that unites all the fields within social studies. Others point out that the humanities—including art, music, and philosophy—can also be taught through historical study.

Instead of focusing almost completely on political, military, and diplomatic events, there is much more concern with social history—how average people lived, worked, and played. Religion, ideas, art and music, entertainment and sports are important aspects of human life and should be included in the study of any historical period. Moreover, history has become more inclusive. Students are learning about all peoples and cultures who have preceded us on this planet. The history of civilizations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas has been combined with the traditional coverage of Western Europe to attempt a true *world* history. U.S. history now includes the contributions of all groups who have built this nation.

Finally, there is an emphasis on genuine understanding of historical events, not just acquisition and memorization of facts. Today's students are learning about broad themes and ideas that have been pervasive throughout history. They are taught to analyze cause and effect, distinguish between fact and opinion, and view historical events from multiple perspectives.

**Trend 2: More Geography, Too.** Along w[illegible] history, geography has become a primary foundation of the social studies curriculum. The subject almost disappeared from the K-12 curriculum in the 1960s and 1970s, but has had an amazing resurgence in the past decade—as a separate course and integrated into history and other social studies courses. Geographers and educators have agreed upon the five themes of geography that serve as a framework for geographic understanding and illustrate the relationship between human history and the earth, between time and place. These themes are (1) developing a sense of place; (2) developing locational skills and understanding the significance of location; (3) understanding the interaction between humans and the natural environment through time; (4) understanding the reasons for and the importance of human migration; and (5) understanding world regions and the interrelated impact of cultural and global interdependence. As history has changed to focus more on social history, geography has gone beyond mere memorization of capitals and national resources to become "human geography."

**Trend 3: Using Literature to Teach Social Studies.** This trend has particular implications for elementary social studies, but secondary teachers also are finding that they can enrich their courses with appropriate fiction and non-fiction literature. Student interest is heightened when literature is used as an integral part of a social studies program. Literature includes fiction, biography and autobiography, speeches, diaries, poetry, myths and legends, plays, and even religious literature. Carefully selected literature can make historical periods come to life and provide a flavor of the thoughts and feelings surrounding an historical event. Excerpts from *Sarah Plain and Tall* can give young students an accurate and dramatic picture of life on the prairie during the mid-1800's. Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*, with its inspiring lines about "...America, America!," can convey the sense of excitement, anticipation, and challenge that faced immigrants to the U.S. And Joseph Logsdon's *The Diary of a Slave* provides a chilling portrait of the impact of the Civil War on African American slaves in Louisiana.

**Trend 4: Focus on the Multicultural Nature of American Society.** The United States has been called a "nation of nations." More immigrants are coming to this nation today than in the great period of immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s. But today's new Americans are coming from every nation and cultural region in the world. All Americans, both old and new, belong in the history of this nation. Recognition of this diverse and changing society is associated with the term "multiculturalism." The effective social studies curriculum highlights and celebrates the diversity of our society. A true multicultural perspective presents an accurate picture of all the different groups that comprise our pluralistic society. Students learn about the beliefs and goals that bind us together as a nation. The motto—*e pluribus unum* (from many, one)—forms the basis of a realistic and beneficial multicultural education.

**Trend 5: Renewed Attention to Western Civilization.** One of the most difficult tasks facing teachers and curriculum developers today is balancing multiculturalism with the appropriate focus on America's heritage from western Europe, which is also marked by diversity. While it is essential that students should learn about the contributions and heritage of all Americans, they should also learn about the origins of many of the beliefs and principles that have made the United States unique among nations. Without neglecting the important ideas and technological advances of peoples in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas, students are learning about the growth of political and economic freedom that had its roots primarily in western Europe. Moreover, these ideals have become a model for governments throughout the world. Recognizing that the underlying principles of our political system have a western European base is just as important as, for example, giving credit to the Chinese for inventing paper or to the people of India for developing the zero in arithmetic. The new social studies curriculum seems to be heading for a blend of global multiculturalism, including emphasis on western civilization.

---

**C. Frederick Risinger is the Associate Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education and Associate Director of the Social Studies Development Center, Indiana University.**



BEST COPY AVAI[illegible]

**Trend 6: Renewed Attention to Ethics and Values.** Until the late 1950s and early 1960s, many social studies textbooks had chapters where values such as honesty or punctuality were emphasized. This attention to values changed during the late 1960s and 1970s to one of values clarification or even "value-free" social studies, where students were encouraged to examine their beliefs, but no attempt was made to guide them toward a predetermined set of values. Today's social studies programs are beginning to encourage students to examine the role of the individual in society and the responsibilities and behaviors that lead to a just and fair nation. Sometimes referred to as "civic virtue," these qualities include a sense of fair play, a respect for minority rights, tolerance of other beliefs, and a desire to actively participate in a democratic society. These values are embedded in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

**Trend 7: Increased Attention to the Role of Religion.** Like ethics and values, religion almost disappeared from the social studies curriculum in the past 25 years. Ignoring the role and significance of religion throughout history and in the contemporary world leaves a massive gap that prevents students from fully understanding the past or present. Many major historical events or issues such as the Crusades, the half-century of struggle and war between India and Pakistan, and today's bitter conflicts in the former Yugoslavia are based on religion.

In today's classrooms, students learn about the origins and growth of the Muslim faith and its close relationship to both Judaism and Christianity. They learn that, while the Pilgrims fled religious persecution, they were just as intolerant of other beliefs in New England. Teaching about the impact of religion in history and contemporary society is closely linked to multicultural and ethical education. Knowing about, comparing, and understanding religious beliefs is a key element in developing tolerance and a comprehension of one of the primary motivating factors in human affairs.

**Trend 8: Attention to Contemporary and Controversial Issues.** As with religion, many textbook publishers and curriculum developers have avoided controversial issues. This is a barrier to the development of critical thinking and decision making necessary for effective participation in a democratic society. The *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* says: "History without controversy is not good history."

One way to help students deal with controversial topics is to examine an issue through the eyes of all individuals or groups who were involved. Seeing the arrival of Columbus or the arrival of Spanish or English settlers through the eyes of indigenous peoples of the Americas is an example. Examining the controversial decision to colonize the Philippines and comparing the protests that erupted in the streets with those related to opposition to America's role in Vietnam can help students understand contemporary events in the U.S. and other nations. An excellent approach is to use primary documents, such as newspaper accounts, speeches, diaries, and autobiographies.

**Trend 9: Covering Issues in Depth.** If students are to acquire the understanding and skills necessary for effective participation as citizens, they must explore topics in depth. Trying to teach all of world or U.S. history in a single year is both impossible and ineffective. The perspective and thoughtful judgment that should be a primary goal of social studies requires sufficient time for students to explore topics in depth, analyze a variety of literature and other sources of information, and discuss issue-oriented questions with other students and the teacher. Students who are taught the in-depth approach learn more information, enhance their ability to relate knowledge to other situations, and enjoy their social studies classes more. More important, they perform well on standardized tests. Many states and local districts are dividing their U.S. and world history classes into two- or three-year courses, providing more time for student and teachers to concentrate on fewer topics. Others concentrate on major themes or issues in building their courses and units.

**Trend 10: Writing, Writing, and More Writing.** Student writing is the most effective way to improve general student achievement. Quite simply, students who write more learn more. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the social studies, where the thoughtful deliberation involved in writing leads to enhanced creativity and helps students connect reading, writing, and other subject areas.

Writing is one of the best ways to utilize the in-depth approach to social studies. Effective writing assignments require sufficient time to both explore a topic prior to writing and discuss it with classmates and teachers as part of the evaluation process. Group writing assignments have been effectively used as part of social studies. Many teachers keep "portfolios" of student writing to help expand assessment techniques.

**References and ERIC Resources**

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by and ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. Telephone numbers are 800-443-3742 and 703-404-1400. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION), which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of many libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below.


American Federation of Teachers. EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY: A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES. GUIDELINES FOR STRENGTHENING THE TEACHING OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES. Washington DC: American Federation of Teachers, 1987. ED 313 271.

Bahmueller, Charles F., Charles N. Quigley, et al. CIVITAS: A FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIC EDUCATION. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 1991. ED 340 654.

Bradley Commission for History in Schools. BUILDING A HISTORY CURRICULUM: GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING HISTORY IN SCHOOLS. Westlake, OH: National Council for History Education, Inc., 1988. ED 310 008.

Curriculum Task Force of the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools. CHARTING A COURSE: SOCIAL STUDIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY. Washington, DC: National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 1989. ED 317 450.

History-Social Science Curriculum Framework and Criteria Committee. HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK FOR CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE TWELVE. Sacramento, CA: California State Board of Education, 1987. ED 293 779.

Patrick, John J. SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM REFORM REPORTS. ERIC DIGEST EDO-SO-90-3. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1990. ED 322 021.

Parker, Walter. RENEWING THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum Development, 1991. ED 341 114.

Risinger, C. Frederick. CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL STUDIES. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992. ED number to be assigned.



**This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RI88062009. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.**